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**On the planned redundancies at the Departments of
English & Creative Writing and History**

Vienna, 02 Nov 2021

Dear Warden of Goldsmiths, Dear Chair of Council, Dear Senior Management Team,

We are writing to you as members of “Poetry Off the Page: Literary History and the Spoken Word, 1965-2020”, based at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. Our five-year project is funded by an ERC Consolidator Grant as well as the prestigious START Prize of the Austrian Science Fund. The Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths is one of our most important collaborators, and individual staff members there have been integral to the development of this ground-breaking project working on spoken word in the UK. We are now working in partnership with academic staff on our Black and Asian spoken word poetry as well as spoken-word play research strands. We are co-hosting vital project events in the Department, such as an international spoken word poetry conference (2022), and the Department of English academics will be working with our team to produce a plethora of journal articles, exhibitions, podcasts and other important outreach activities. As I am sure that you are aware, working in collaboration with such internationally-funded research projects is of immeasurable benefit not just to the Department of English and Creative Writing, but to Goldsmiths in general.

Consequently, we are dismayed to learn that senior management at Goldsmiths have issued redundancy notices to 52 members of academic and administrative staff, among them many members of the Departments of English & Creative Writing, and History. We believe that this goes against the very ethos of Goldsmiths as an institution dedicated to advancing new frontiers of scholarly research – particularly in the Arts and Humanities, which have always been one of the college’s chief strengths. These redundancies will ultimately damage Goldsmiths’ standing within the international academic community.

We are alarmed that Senior Management would contemplate making redundancies within the Arts and Humanities at a time when careful investigation, debate, and teaching about cultural heritage, history, and the arts has never been more important, given the onset of the so-called ‘culture wars’, the ever-widening inequities exposed by the COVID-19 crisis, and governmental commitments to ‘levelling up’ educational and economic attainment for all. The crucial work performed by colleagues in the Department of English & Creative Writing are fundamental to addressing these issues, as evidenced by Dr Deirdre Osborne running the world’s only MA course in Black British

Literatures, which she launched with Prof. Joan Anim-Addo, as well as Dr Osborne's invaluable *Contemporary Black British Literature: A Guide*, which provides crucial A-Level materials and encourages schools to teach texts that celebrate those often marginalised within Britain including LGBTQI+, mixed-race and care-experienced lives.

Our PI Julia Lajta-Novak, leading another project in biography criticism, has also collaborated closely with Prof. Lucia Boldrini in the recent past, who is a key figure in life writing research and biofiction studies. Besides playing a vital role in the International Comparative Literature Association, of which she is Vice President, she is regularly invited to deliver keynote addresses (most recently at a large biofiction conference at the KU Leuven) and is editor of a new, cutting-edge book series on biographical fiction at Bloomsbury Academic – a field that is currently doing much to theorise our relation to history and fact, which is becoming ever more important in 'post-factual' societies.

The Departments' colleagues should be invested in and nourished by the University to grow and advance such scholarship and activities, not be subjected to sharp cuts that would only exacerbate precarious working conditions with an adverse effect on staff and students.

We would also like to point out that the University of Vienna has always had close ties with Goldsmiths, our own Department of English and American Studies regularly sending students to Goldsmiths' English Department via the Erasmus scheme prior to Brexit, and recommending Goldsmiths' postgraduate programmes to our students even after Brexit, on the grounds of its excellent reputation in the Arts and Humanities. Now we feel that if the staff and students of the Department of English and Creative Writing are treated with such contempt, we will no longer be able to recommend the College to our graduates.

We deplore Senior Management's attempts to make members of staff redundant and advise Goldsmiths to retract these redundancy notices immediately and seek other ways of achieving financial balance.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Emily Kate Timms

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